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ABSTRACT

The document's major portion addresses aspects of rural social work practice from importance of the worker's first actions to knowing when and how to leave successfully. Beginning with "What is your Rural IQ?" and some definitions of rurality, all subsequent sections conclude with "Some Exercises and Mental Challenges" and a reading list. Emphasis is placed on taking time to assess rural communities' rich and varied social networks. It is recognized that official support services and unofficial approval of social workers may be slim or nonexistent. Suggestions are made for stretching resources and applying new technologies. Attention is paid to the changing countryside picture: urban to rural migration, boom town impacts, industrial decentralization, and a continuing drain from rural to other areas. A smaller section suggests that line staff in small communities consider case management as a way of rethinking and organizing material in the previous sections. Trigger questions are provided to assist social workers in combining their job experiences with concepts provided in the document. Information provided under each question is intended to further vigorous thinking about the topic. Seven questions deal with agency assessment, six with case assessment, and one each covers case monitoring and case coordination. (BRR)

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RURAL PRACTICE: GETTING IN, KEEPING UP, GETTING OUT

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WHAT IS YOUR RURAL I.Q.?

Can you answer these questions? Many of us think that we know rural America's but Rural America is changing. Here is an opportunity to see whether you are up-to-date or behind the times.

Answer True or False

1. Unemployment is higher for farm families than for non farm families.

2. By the late 1970's most hired farmworkers lived in non-farm areas.

3. Most of the elderly are in the sunbelt.

4. There are about twice as many physicians per 100,000 in urban areas as in rural areas.

5. We are rapidly converting farm and forest land to non-producing land.

6. Rural people, particularly the rural elderly living in areas that lag economically, tend to resist change.

7. From 1970 to 1976 rural areas grew in population at a faster rate than urban areas.

8. Urban populations are generally better educated than rural populations.

9. The poverty rate is twice as bad in urban than in rural areas.

10. 40% or 4,000,000 of new non-farm jobs that opened from 1970-1977 were in non-metropolitan areas.

11. Job satisfaction levels among rural social workers is generally low.

12. In terms of population trends, small metropolitan areas like Rochester, Sioux Falls and Fargo act more like rural areas and very small towns than like larger urban centers.

Do you think that you have the right answers pegged down? Great, then turn the page, but be prepared for some surprises-

1. False. Unemployment is actually lower for farm families, however income is lower, too.

2. True. By 1977, almost 4 out of 5 (79%) lived off the farm.

3. False. In 1970, of the seven states with the highest percentage of elderly, only Florida was not in the Central section of the country - one of the major rural areas of the country.

4. True. Actually it is even worse than twice as high. The actual figure is about 171 physicians per 100,000 in urban areas but only 81 per 100,000 in rural areas.

5. True. We are converting farm and forest land to nonproducing land at the rate of about 2 million acres a year.

6. False. Generally, rural residents, including the elderly, have attitudes that favor change.

7. True. Metropolitan areas grew by 4.1% but non-metropolitan areas grew by 6.6%.

8. True. Sadly, 22.1% of urban and 33.2% of rural American adults have less than a ninth grade education.

9. False. 1 in 4 rural residents is poor compared with 1 in 8 urban and 1 in 15 suburban residents.

10 True. This rise in non-metropolitan areas has been one of the most significant changes in the rural envirohment.

11. False. In the late 1970's job satisfaction was high, according to Kim and Boo, 1978.

12. True. Calvin Beale at the Conference on Rural America, July, 1976, reported this parallel between small metropolitan areas and rural areas.

This little quiz is meant as a reminder. Rural areas are not just backwaters with no future. Rural areas are not all the same. Rural areas can be a place for frustration, creativity, and all the complex demands that lead to demanding but innovative practice.

RURALITY (Definitions)

The definitions of rurality are numerous probably because there is no one statement that captures the essentials completely. The standard definitions each have a kernel of information to contribute that helps in outlining rurality.

1. Population Size:

A standard definition of what is rural comes from the United States Census which states that an area is rural if it has 2,500 or fewer inhabitants. Size is the most basic building block in constructing a description of rurality. Still, size takes on more meaning when it is combined with other factors that describe the population base, like population density and distance from an urban center, i.e., isolation. The interest in density and isolation has a long history in the literature, especially since these are two dimensions that have made it easy to compare rural and urban centers. This approach of contrasting rural and urban centers is an old one, dating back to the turn of the century. The emphasis is on ideal types with rural areas being stable agricultural centers characterized by traditional values and strong family relations reinforced by the dominantly farming economy. Urban centers are by contrast, supposed to be heterogeneous in population with an emphasis on change, segmental relationships and rational bureaucratic lifestyles. The idea of rural areas as a pastoral paradise has been changing, but the old stereotype has been a continuing influence.

2. Geographic and Economic Environments:

Increasingly, writers and practitioners are looking at a series of factors that focus on rurality as part of a larger ecosystem of urban center, urban fringe, suburbia, exurbia and rural areas. In this case, one can consider the rural area as part of a

whole region. Unfortunately, the tendency has been to look at rural areas as still being defined by not being urban. Another approach that has gained popularity is to define rural areas in terms of the economic base. Increasing recognition of the rural areas as places that are areas that can not only support primary industries (farming, fishing, mining) but also secondary industries (manufacturing) and tertiary (social services). Impetus has been given to the economic structured view of rurality as businesses like the textile industry moved south to the Sun Belt. Even in a period of economic scarcity, the rural economy continues to depend on industries other than agriculture.

3. Multidimensional Models:

The new trend in describing and defining rurality is to approach the concept as a complex of factors that form a series of unique but related communities that can be called rural. Dunlap and Catton (1979) locate communities by the way that the environment is used and the degree of urbanization. Willets and Bealer (1967) discuss the variations in terms of both the number of rural characteristics and the degree (amount of a characteristic). Some theorists go so far as to say that rurality should be defined by the people themselves who have a sense of their own rural heritage and identity (wherever they are).

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. Look at a map of your state. Choose a rural town in a county other than yours. What do you think the effect on it would be if:

   a) A major highway were built through town.

   b) An atomic plant were built there (and if there was a leak).

   c) A large natural gas deposit was found and developed.

   d) A resort was built there that catered to people who want to lose weight.

   e) The new majority whip in the United States House of Representatives were from that town.

2. What are the leading industries in the rural areas of your state and how is the fuel crunch likely to affect them? Are they likely to suffer more or less than the urban or suburban areas during an economic recession?

3. Are you a "country cousin" or a "city slicker"? Which of your characteristics makes you one or the other?

4. What differences would there be if the regional planning council was located in the town rather than in the nearest large town/city?

Reading List:

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Frederico, Ron et al. (editors) 1977 Appalachian Citizens for Children's Rights, A Rural Community Self-Help Approach to the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, Washington, D.C.: OHD ED 162446.

Martinez-Brawley, E.E. 1981 "Identifying and describing the context of rural in social work." Arete 6(2): 21-32.

Willits, F.K. and R.E. Bealer 1967 "An evaluation of a composite definition of 'rurality'." Rural Sociology 32(June).

YOU ARE GETTING IN:

Step 1. "Courtship"-The Importance of Your First Steps.

In every project there is a beginning. Entry into the rural community is a particularly important part of successfully working in the rural environment. In an area that is small enough so that most people will know most of what goes on in their community, a worker's first actions will be discussed as part of the normal local gossip. Visibility is an important element of rural practice, and it is a two-edged sword. Both mistakes and successes will be more open for public discussion than in an area in which a worker is just part of a large bureaucracy.

Visibility not only spotlights the worker but also the people who have dealings with the social worker. Another aspect of being seen is that people will see those you involve in your practice. This includes clients, support networks of other agencies, and consultants, especially local ones. By definition, this means that the community also sees who is not involved in your practice, and this can also be a "touchy" issue.

Given this special need to make a good first impression, how does the worker begin without becoming terrified about every move that he or she makes? There are a few suggestions that make it easier. The first is to take time. David Steinberg, the comedian, used to tell a story about having a dream in which he went into the elevator in his apartment building and met a man in a trench coat, dark glasses, and a hat. Steinberg asks who he is, and the man replies, "I'm The Coast." Many people talk about California as The Coast, but there is more to the West than that. In the same way, the tendency has been to talk about Rural America as if it were all the same: everything not defined as cities and suburbs is rural America. The rural practitioner knows, however, that there are a great diversity of rural Americas, not one. A new member of the community needs to take time to assess the area before jumping in with both feet. This may even affect

what seems on the surface not to be an important practice issue, for example. Some people are finding that the type of building in which a social service office is located will affect the number of people who use it. If the office is in a place that seems a natural spot for people to be going, even if they are not seeking social services, then the office may get more clients who would be shy of public disapproval. Assess the options.

There is a tendency to fuse the person and the office. What one person does as the town social worker is seen as the basic social work perspective. The effect is to give a special influence to the isolated worker. It also makes it particularly important for the rural worker to know the power of having a professional position.

The flip side of knowing your own influence and power is to know others'. A worker needs to learn a bit about the social ropes. When can you be heard without turning the community against social workers in general, and you in particular?

All of the suggestions that have been made are part of one concept—courtship. Business people know much about it, and social workers need to be able to use it. It is the art of learning how to woo potential clients and co-workers so that one can get the job done efficiently and effectively. One caution, though—remember

"Marry in haste and repent at leisure."

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. In your family, when you are all eating together, who usually starts a new topic of discussion? Who has the last word? What is that person's sex, age, and family "rank"?

2. What non-verbal cues do you give with your body language, dress, and manners that type you as a social worker?

Reading List

Goffman, Erving 1959 The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Company.

Kelley, V. 1981 "The importance of office location in rural community mental health delivery." Paper presented at the Sixth National Institute on Social Work in Rural Areas.

Step 2. "Learning the Ropes"-Community Assessment

The most important factor leading to success is making creative use of available resources. The ability to develop a system of supports for clients depends on this ability to exploit every potential resource in the community. Community Assessment is therefore an essential element in rural practice. How to make an assessment is a subject that may be discussed thoroughly in school but takes on some special, new characteristics when one applies this technique in a rural setting.

Most people have had the experience of comparing notes with friends about something that has happened and finding that they were all involved in the blind men and the elephant syndrome. Each blind man felt the elephant, but a different part of the beast, so, naturally each came up with a different description. In a sense, workers in the rural environment strive to overcome a similar problem in their assessments. It is important to consider not only the needs and resources in your community but also the point of view that people have about using what is available. An interesting featur of working in rural areas is that the worker may encounter less actual opposition to an idea or plan than passive resistance. Moreover, if the opinion leaders in a community do not support a project, chances are that very few others will. The rural worker has to be clever about timing proposals, therefore, so that they are built on a solid foundation of community support. One way of testing out ideas and locating resources in a rural setting is with some good, old-fashioned digging in records. The agencies' records are, of course, a part of the process; but, there are other good sources, too.

1. Local newspapers. If there is a local newspaper, it will tend to have a wealth of local information about opinions, meetings, and general goings-on that will give a sense of the local power structure and attitudes. The old issues are a

good source of locating background. Old-timers at the paper tend to be good sources, too.

2. Local schools/colleges. Because educational organizations are resource repositories that store knowledge and materials, people are bound to keep records. Reading up on school board meetings, PTA meetings, even school newspapers may reward the searcher with good background information, as well as suggestions about potential resources.

3. Church records. There may be a lot of chaff to winnow through, but church records may be a good source of information, especially about charity drives and other private attempts at providing social services.

4. Fraternal organizations/historical societies. These records are a good source of information about "who's who" and about civic betterment projects. Again, however, there is bound to be a lot of irrelevant material. Access may also be a problem.

5. Government documents. There is a wealth of material in the town records, though they may seem interminable. Minutes of town meetings, board meetings, even voter registration lists may be valuable resource. Regional studies by the Corp of Engineers, by the Department of Agriculture or the Labor Department as well as the Census are another good set of sources. Court records are another source of records that can sometimes be used.

In rural areas, there are locations that tend to be good sources of information, or rather the people who gather in certain places tend to be good sources. "Oases" where

the community population congregate, perhaps do a little business, and relax, are good sources. The major disadvantage of "oases", as with many of the records mentioned above, is that they do not present The Community Judgment. They are a source about the opinions of certain groups in the community or groups with a vested interest in the community. They tend to under-represent the point of view of the poor and people without influence. We are back to our blind men and the elephant.

As a worker learns what the community views are about social needs and resources, it will naturally lead into assessing resources. Informal helping is a major resource in rural areas. Tapping into a system through a church, civic, or fraternal group, or even through an extra curricular activity group at a school is a legitimate way of expanding the resources available to the worker. Coalitions of diverse professionals who are addressing the same problem, like medical personnel, teachers, ministers, police and social and protective service workers, are another way of extending resources and capturing a variety of perspectives on a problem. This can be particularly helpful if it is used in conjunction with the informal helping networks. The worker may even take this a step further. The needs of the community, especially when there are endemic problems, call for the worker to consider advocacy. To refer back to our story, we need to find ways of having the blind men work together to cover the whole elephant.

Some Mental Exercises and Challenges:

1. If you were reading the minutes of a PTA meeting, how would you judge the accuracy and impartiality of the information that you found in it? Would you use a different approach for assessing a newspaper story? An historical record?

2. Since the point of view of the poor and those without influence tends to be hard to dig out, what special skills do you have that would help you to find this information?

3. How would you develop access to the local "grapevine"?

Reading List:

Baumheier, Edward C., Janet Morton Derr, and Robert W. Gage 1973 Human Services in Rural America: An Assessment of Problems, Policies, and Research. Denver, Colorado: Social Welfare Research Institute, Center for Social Research and Development, University of Colorado.

Johnson, H. Wayne 1980 "Working in the rural community." Pp. 143-148 in H. Wayne Johnson (editor), Rural Human Services: A Book of Readings. Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock.

Southern Rural Development Center "The role of communication and attitudes in small farm programs", Rural Development Series no. 4. Mississippi State, MS

Webb, Eugene J., Donald T. Campbell, Richard Schwartz, and Lee Sechrest 1966 Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Step 3. "Who says?""-The Changing Perspective of Those With Influence

The Romans had a phrase for it, "Qui Bono", for whose benefit. That phrase should still be an important consideration for the professional entering the rural environment. To put this in another way, a worker needs to consider the differing goals of the agency, the worker individually, the clients, and the community as they all affect acceptance of a treatment plan. For the rural worker, the point of view of the groups in the community, i.e. the client(s), the natural helping network(s), other professionals, and the opinion leaders, are particularly significant. Distance may make the heart grow fonder, but out of sight, out of mind is also true.

Since proximity helps the worker to "order priorities", it would seem that it would be easy to plan a successful course of action. Unfortunately, it is not that straightforward. A worker still needs to consider the degree of closure, i.e. the amount of agreement among community groups on goals and on the means to achieve those goals. There is a second type of important consideration, namely, to take the time frame into account. There needs to be a balance between short-and long-term goals and benefits. More-over, the timing of when to initiate action is a critical factor, especially in rural areas.

When one is trying to discover what the goals of community groups are, and how well these aims can be integrated, one is likely to have to deal with the major shifts that have been made in the rural economy. Especially since the rise in the number of jobs associated with non-agricultural industries has occurred, an increasing number of women are working away from home. There is also an increase in the pressures put on the farmer, particularly small ones, by fuel costs, inflation, and the shifts in policy about overseas markets. Added to this hodgepodge is the influence of the new migrants to rural areas: retired people, people attracted by the new industries, people searching for "new lifestyles", even refugees from other countries such as Cuba, Haiti, and Southeast

Asia. Each of these groups has their own agenda, and the agenda is often different from that of the natives and old-time residents. Unless a worker can "test the waters" before launching a new project, he/she may well find the whole undertaking torpedoed even though there would be benefits to the community as a whole. It is time consuming to carefully build toward closure by getting the proper sponsorship of the various elements in the community, but it is necessary.

One method for building toward closure that has been used with success is to assess not only the urgency of need in the community but also the demand for a quick pay off in terms of a product or recognition versus more long-term benefits. Since a rural worker is often isolated, that worker needs to be able to move freely throughout the community and to exploit the resources of every segment of that area. An effective rural worker, therefore, often ends up being an expert "horse trader". To put this another way, "give a little, get a little".

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. Picture yourself in a rural community as the only full time worker who has just been informed that three Haitian families will be moved into your town. What do you think would be the plan of action you would draw up if:

   a. The major industries were farming and some mining.

   b. The major industries are provided by tourism and a retirement community.

   c. The major local employer is a mental institution.

   d. The major local employer is a small state college.

2. You have found that one of the most pressing local problems is teen age pregnancy. How would you develop some "trade-offs" when bargaining with local groups in order to establish a program to deal with the adolescent crisis?

   a. Given that the people in the leadership of the two major churches expressed some tentative interest.

   b. Given that the local paper has been stressing this issue as a moral issue that shows the evil influence of recent migrants to the area.

3. A local fraternal organization is sponsoring a "Dads for Lads" program in which a member takes on having weekly visits with a child in a family of recently settled Haitians. The Haitians complain that the Dads are not only teaching the boys

English and other useful skills, but are also teaching the boys fundamentalist Christianity which does not fit with the religion of the Catholic Haitian parents. How would you handle the situation?

Reading List

Deaton,. and T. Mohr 1977 "Cowboy social work: unique features of social service needs in the rural western states." Paper presented from roundtable at Rural Social Work Annual Program Meeting, CSWE, February.

Johnson, P.J. and J. Beditz 1981 "Community support systems: scaling community acceptance." Community Mental Health Journal, 17(2) Summer: 153-160.

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Tournier, R.E. 1981 "Industrial migration and social chang in non-metropolitan America." Paper presented at Interface '81: Fifth Annual Humanities and Technology Conference, Marietta, Georgia, October.

Step 4. "The Odd Man Out" - Advantages and Disadvantages of Being An Outsider

Who are the "in crowd"? In some places, it is the "Beautiful People"; in others, it is "Old Money" or the "Landed Gentry". In most rural areas, the real "in crowd" are people who were born in the town or at least a sub set of the natives. With the advent of boomtowns and other economic revitilization trends, there are new groups in the environment that have their own elites. However, a disproportionate amount of power and influence is likely to remain with the old guard.

Since the worker is likely not to have been born in the town in which he/she is working, "the" town social worker is by definition an outsider. The worker may eventually be accepted but not as thoroughly integrated as a native. This marginality has both advantages and disadvantages. Though the worker may lack the "pull" of an insider, there is still a lot that can be done to meet the goals of delivering good quality social services.

Many a good novel includes a scene in which a character unburdens him or herself to a total stranger. Being an outsider, with nothing to gain personally, makes the stranger ideal for a confessor. The worker may not be able to have that much "distance", but the very fact that the worker is an outsider may give that person a degree of impartiality on which the community comes to depend.

The worker who moves into the area begins his or her history, as far as the community is concerned, at the moment when he or she arrives. There are no past associations to use for support, but there are also none to try to live down. Here, the worker can develop a new, adult identity.

Many workers from urban areas are wary of moving to a rural section, especially given the anti-urban bias of country folk that the mass media discusses so thoroughly. Some city slickers have found a way around the problem. Knowing that there is bound to be a degree of cultural difference and cultural shock, these outsiders seek out "native

guides" who can show them the way around the new country. By taking the subordinate position and allowing the old-timers to lead, the worker is adding to the necessary courtship process that every new community expects. There is also a tendency to make allowances for a newcomer. This is an advantage, however, only as long as the newcomer is seen to be someone who does not think that the city is better than the country. Otherwise, there is a tendency to try to get the better of the "smart aleck"

Another advantage that an outsider has is that a new person may bring a new perspective on problems. A fresh assessment may liven up attempts to deal with social problems. Of course, the worker must again avoid being seen as a "know-it-all"; still the new ideas should not be underplayed. Part of bringing a new perspective may be contributing a new set of support systems. The new worker may have connections with people and/ or organizations that can serve as consultants or even advocates for the community.

By listing the advantages of being an outsider, we have not meant to imply that there are not significant disadvantages, too. Especially workers who are coming from an existence spent totally in the city are bound to experience culture shock: The way things work in a rural area are different from that in an urban setting. The lack of privacy, lack of formal resources and a sense of isolation can present stumbling blocks to the newly rusticated worker. Moreover, there may be some role conflicts that a new migrant into a rural setting has to work through. What is it that a worker should do? What should a worker not do? The answers may vary considerably from what the worker had originally been trained to expect.

Overall, many newcomers have found that, though it takes some doing, a person can make a very successful transition into a rural area. The key seems to be to learn that being on the outside does not have to mean being left out.

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. If you were a new worker in a rural area on your first day in your job and a client came to you seeking homemaker assistance that your agency did not have the money to supply, how would you proceed?

2. If you were new in town, how would you make yourself and your agency known to the community?

3. How would you as a recent newcomer to a rural town work to keep up with the new ways of handling difficult cases that are being developed?

Reading List:

Miller, R.S. 1981 "Successful urban-to-rural professional role transition" in Community Mental Health Journal 17 (2) Summer: 143-152.

Sherman, J. and L. Rowley 1977 "Confidentiality: What is private in a rural area?" Pp. 10-19 in David Bast and Julie Schmidt (eds.), Second Annual Northern Wisconsin Symposium on Human Services in The Rural Environment Reader. Milwaukee, WI: University of Wisconsin - Extension Center for Social Service.

Webster, S. and P. Campbell 1977 "Contextual Differences in Rural Social Work". Pp. 2-9 in Bast and Schmidt.

OTHERS GOING IN:

Step 1. "The New Kid on The Block" - Who is Moving to Rural Areas

The American people have had an idealized vision of country life for a long time. Sometimes it is a dream of a safe, healthy, productive and friendly environment in which to live and raise children. Sometimes the vision is more like a nightmare of backward, inbred, clannish communities (as in Deliverance). Rarely is consideration given to the dynamic quality of rural life in America today. This potential of rural communities comes clear, however, when a person looks at the range of types of people who are moving to rural America.

The people who are "going in" can be broken into several groups: those who are moving to get away from the city, those who are moving because of some perceived advantage in country life, and those who are placed in a rural setting. This list just paints the patterns of migration with the broadest of outlines but it serves as a starting point.

With desegregation being a hot topic during the 60's and 70's, a lot of media coverage was given to "White Flight" to the suburbs to avoid integrated schools. How much of this flight actually is attributable to flight has not been settled. Nevertheless, for a number of decades, particularly after World War II, Americans have tried to move to the suburbs when they got married and had children. As crime in the city, high taxes and outmoded public services, and a weakening economic base led to disillusionment and even fear of living in the city, this out-migration increased. People were leaving the city. Indeed, the move tended to be less focused on where to move to than on just the act of getting away from the city. Rural areas may receive part of this group of people in flight if the rural area is relatively close to a metropolitan area. Most of the people do not run far—only to the first place that they perceive to be a haven, i.e., suburbia or

exurbia or environs. This group may present the worker with some practice challenges since they come with a set of values already set and do not have the impetus of a desire to become rural to help them in becoming acclimated.

Not all of the people trying to escape the city are White and middle class. The poor and minorities are moving out, too. In some cases the poor are being driven out by a relatively recent trend of "gentrification" of the old central core of the city. It is true that people are fleeing the city, but a certain number are moving back to the core, rehabilitating old buildings, building condominiums and, in a number of ways, taking over formerly poor neighborhoods. Where are the poor to go, especially with a lack of housing? They may be pushed out to rural areas, particularly rural areas near metropolitan areas. These people present a different set of challenges for the worker than the middle class out-migrants. The poor come with fewer resources to call upon and fewer skills for finding new support systems.

A number of groups are migrating toward rural areas for the advantages that they believe are there. Some of these groups include: retired people, people in an industry that is opening up job opportunities in rural areas, and people seeking an alternative lifestyle. In many cases, these people who are attracted to rural areas are returning rural residents. If they are not going back to the specific place where they grew up, they are going back to a lifestyle that they remember. In some ways this aids with the transition since the returning migrant knows something about life in a rural area. It is a mixed blessing, however. Time tends to distort memory so that the expectations that people form may not be based on very good information. Moreover, with time having past, rural communities are at a different stage of development and so are the individuals themselves. A child's perception of a place with plenty to do on a Sunday afternoon may not be the same as a retired person's. Return migrants risk disillusionment.

A major advantage in being attracted to the area is that whatever the attraction is, the migrant does have a special reason to try to fit in and to adapt. If, as in the case of some people who are "dropping out", the desire to adapt to the rural environment more than the specific values and norms of the area in which they live, major #conflicts can develop between the old and new residents. Boomtowns, where major economic shifts bring in large numbers of outsiders, have had to deal with the problem of different subcultures developing and dividing the town.

There is a major difference in what the attraction of the rural area is, too. Those who are retired or seeking a new lifestyle may put a high priority on maintaining the environment while people who come for the jobs may well be looking for the best methods to build up that industry. Neither of these goals is necessarily in much agreement with the goal of many long-time residents, to preserve a lifestyle that they value and to provide opportunities for their children. A worker may have to deal with widespread dissension within the rural community.

If the expectations have been a problem for the migrants attracted to the rural area, these expectations are even more of a problem for the third group—people placed in the rural environment. Increasingly in the 70's and 80's, Americans are becoming aware of the problems of the refugee groups who are settling, or rather in many cases just being placed, in rural areas. Cubans, Haitians, Southeast Asians have all been in the public eye. A worker may have to deal with the shock that the refugee is going through in the loss of their country of origin and the need to adapt to a new alien culture. The expectations that the refugees have may be unrealistic and yet this is no more of a problem than the other side of the story: the expectations that the old-timers have may be unrealistic, too. Anger and antagonism can easily develop. If a refugee can, with the help available, acquire the basic language and job skills to survive, the community and the refugee then have a "breathing space" in which to adjust. It is here that a worker may make a major contribution.

Jails and hospitals are often "stuck away" in rural areas, too. When people are released from the facilities, they may end up in the local rural areas by default. Once a person is put in the rural area it takes resources to get out. A worker may have these peoples'needs to meet, too. For many of these people, the need to learn this alien culture and to acquire survival skills is just as critical as for the refugee. Moreover, the released person may face the same type of conflicts with the old-timers as a refugee.

In summary, the rural worker needs to be aware of not only the problems of the individuals in need of service but also the need of the community to forge a cohesive unit out of disparate groups. If that isn't a dynamic agenda, nothing is!

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. If you were a worker in a rural area where a new industry was opening up, how could you assist:

   a. the present town residents prepare for the changes that might come if the new business was a major success—a major failure—
   b. the management of the new business to prepare workers coming into the area to adjust successfully
   c. to ensure that there would be adequate social services for old and new residents

2. How would you begin a "survival skills" self-help and support group for recently released mental patients who are left in the community?

3. Do you see yourself as someone trying to flee the city, or move toward the rural country life, or are you just placed in a rural setting? Can you be more than one of these at a time?

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Step 2. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" - Groups of Industries Moving In

With the number of groups and industries moving into the rural areas of the country increasing, the whole process may look like everyone is off to the most exclusive party omitting only cities from the guest list. There is a grain of truth in this. Non-metropolitan areas have been waging aggressive campaigns to attract people and jobs to the rural areas. Moreover, population patterns had already been shifting density towards the suburbs even before the "invitation" from rural areas went out. The migration toward rural areas had great potential to increase rural prosperity with these two draws, but there are stumbling blocks. Just like a good dinner hostess, the rural community must make sure that the invited guests are compatible and that the guests don't wreck the hostess' home.

Rural areas have always exploited their basic resources through primary industries like farming and forestry. The upswing has been in consolidating the more traditional family operations into large "agri-business" ventures and in secondary and tertiary industries moving into non-metropolitan areas. Secondary industry includes manufacturing and production companies. When a plant moves to a rural setting, it is usually to capitalize on the labor pool, the transportation system, and to some degree the tax incentives. Unemployment rates have been raised in rural areas by the consolidating of small into large-scale farms. Rural areas have not been heavily unionized so wages are usually lower than in the cities. Both of these factors may make the rural labor force seem like a resource just waiting to be tapped. Additionally, there has been a movement since World War II for people to move out of the city to the suburs. The workers who had traditionally worked in the plant may have preceeded the manufacturers into the countryside, or at least begun the trek out. This move out of the city has greatly improved the transportation systems that reach into rural areas so that

now it is possible to move goods into and out of rural areas. Lenient tax structures have added to the attraction of the rural setting. This begins to sound like the perfect union of industry and community. Well, here is the catch.

The level of skill that are necessary for working in a plant may mean that the locals are left out of the new employment boom except at the lowest and most menial levels. If the industry then attracts newcomers, skilled labor, to the area, the situation is ripe for hostility between the old and new residents and for a strain on social services to occur. Some rural areas have been able to work around the problem by carefully assessing the local resources and trying to attract industries that fit the existing commumity. Another strategy has been to use local community colleges as centers to help in gearing up the local labor pool to meet the requirements of the industry coming into the area. In whatever method that is chosen, a worker can be of the greatest assistance in helping with the assessment that is the basis of the plan: the worker is assuring that the right guests are at the party and that there is enough to eat and to drink.

Social service, tertiary industries, are also moving into rural settings. These range from retirement villages to think tanks to summer canps. They bring with them a special advantage that a plant may not. They are less likely to destroy the environment, after all, the beauty of a rural setting may have been one of the original attraction. There the rub is that in a desire to preserve the invironment, the newcomers may not allow for the development that is a byprooduct of the rural area and the rural economy changing and expanding. There may be increasing stress on the services that the community is expected to provide but not a willingness to help the established groups to deliver the services (sewage, road maintenance, police protection, social services, health care, etc.). Tertiary industries may also attract newcomers more than supply jobs to old timers, just lide secondary industry. The worker may hear the complaint that the established community is worse off than when the process began since there are still

underutilized people and now there are overstressed services. This is what was meant by "Leaving the hostess' home a wreck".

Well, the last of the problems before we start the party is making sure that the guests who are invited make an interesting mix, one that will add to everybody's enjoyment. There needs to be an attempt to see that range of types to newcomers are attracted to rural areas. This gives a more stable base to the economy and is less likely to overstrain any one public service. It is a difficult trick to pull off. Regional planning councils have been one mechanism that allows for this sort of sophisticated planning for rural development but it is far from perfect. Community development skills that a worker has are needed in the changing rural America but the worker may fing that the process of helping the development of an area is as challenging and nerve racking to accomplish as hosting a diplomatic ball for an Arab official in Jerusalem.

[1]Primary industry uses the environment directly. Secondary industry processes raw materials. Tertiary industry delivers social services.

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges

1. You are part of a planning commission in a rural area. What combination of primary, secondary and/or tertiary industry would you think would bring the greatest benefit to your community if:

   a. your community is made up of several very large grain farming operations and a number of small farms and is located 2 hours from a Mid-western city (by car)
   b. your community is a small fishing village in New England
   c. your community is a ski resort in the Rockies

2. What sort of problems are likely to crop up if you have the situation in which a new plant opens and a woman who had been at home is hired to a janitor. Her husband who is an unemployed tenant farmer can't find a job with the plant. They have three children, all of whom are school aged.

3. A new summer camp is to open in your area. How might you "sell" the owners of the camp on using your local labor? How would you find skills that can be "marketed"?

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Step 3. "Why me?" - Problems Moving into Rural Areas

There is an old story that farmer had his young son pick up a heifer everyday. As the boy grew and the cow grew, they still went through the same procedure everyday. Finally, in maturity, the boy could pick up a fullgrown cow. In some way, the endemic social problems that plague rural areas are like the cow in the story. They have always been there so the community, as it grows, gets use to shouldering them. This is not to make light of the problems. Some are serious: Medical neglect, lack of education especially for special needs children, inadequate housing. What has happened is that many communities have found some way to adjust. Informal helping networks are used when a crisis occurs. Beyond the critical period, People either make do with inadequate resources since that is the norm or they go out of the region to get the services. A worker may have difficulty in developing services to meet these problems since the community has in a sense defined the problems away. Trying to awaken the community to the urgency of the problems is an important if frustrating task for the rural worker. The sort of social problem that does tend to get the attention of the rural community is the problem that moves into the community. A rural community and the people who live in that community have certain expectations about how life is to be. It may be acceptable to a Minnesotan to have to deal with a certain number of people in town getting "cabin fever" by the end of winter. It just may be too much to have to deal with a certain number of cases of rare tropical diseases turning up that the populace suspects are being brought in by a refugee family. The community will give top priority to solving the inappropriate social problem. It is as if the community as a group was willing to put up with problems that fit its self-image but if it doesn't, the group then say, "Why me? Why should I suffer with this?" It is a basic tenet of social work to start where the client is. Still, it is often a major frustration for a rural worker who has only limited resources to find that the community is more willing to assist in dealing with new but not particularly pressing problems rather than endemic social ills.

The idea of problems moving into the area is becoming an issue because problems do seem to be spreading out from the city to the country side and because there are problems that are a by-product of the changing economic base of rural areas. People have fled to "the peaceful countryside" only to find that crime and drug abuse and violence that had been associated with the city is moving out to infest other areas. Indeed, there are indications that rural areas may be major staging and storage areas for large-scale crime operations involving national and international organizations.

The usual checks and balances that operate in a community to keep the citizenry in line are partly formal but mostly informal. Laws and ordinances are used much less than gossip, shunning or avoidance and other informal mechanisms. This informal social control can be particularly effective since rural people tend to know each other over a long period of time and to have a number of different connections with one another. If a child misbehaves in town, a merchant may have an opportunity to see what is going on and to report it to the child's parents at church on Sunday. When newcomers enter the community, they are not automatically incorporated into this social web. The isolation leaves the newcomers without the same tools for working out a solution to their social problems and also tends to force the community to deal with the newcomers only through the harsh mechanism of the law. A worker, who may also be a newcomer, is often put in the position of needing to find more mechanisms to allow the community to deal with the inevitable problems that arise when there is change without resorting to calling in the police. The worker may find that the community is focusing on what seems to be a relatively minor social problem that has occurred with change because it presents a threat to the informal network of social control. Therefore, what seems on the surface to be minor is really a major issue. The ideal solution is to be able to graft the newcomers onto the strong informal networks of the rural community. In that way the newcomers can maintain some of their own lifestyle within the overall limits of their new surroundings. Of course this is easier said than done. A worker may often wonder, "Why me?" The answer is because you are there

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges

1. Picture yourself as a worker in a rural community about an hour from a major city. You find that there are a large number of runaway youth in your community who are:
   a. running away from their homes in the rural community and fleeing to the city where they are often victimized and sucked into crime
   b. feeling from the city to your community where they tend to camp out in the local national park and are disrupting the community who see the youths as a threat how would you handle the situation?

2. What sort of informal social control do you use to express displeasure to your own boss when he or she does something that you do not feel is appropriate?

3. Have you ever done or not done something because you knew that it was what your parents would wish you to so even though your parents are miles away and would never find out one way or the other? What sort of thing were you doing at the time?

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Step 1. "Too many cooks..."- The Groups That You Have To Answer To and The Priorities That They Represent

The practice of social work in rural areas leaves the worker a wide range of choices about how to do a day's work. The Central Office is probably miles away and there is not a lot of checking done by supervisors who have to spend hours just to get to the worker. Sounds like freedom, right? No confining restrictions, no birddogging, no buttering up the boss—Well, think again. A rural social worker is subject to many and sometimes conflicting demands and obligations. With limited time and resources available, the worker may feel like the new bride who was trying to make her first Thanksgiving dinner. Everytime she went into the kitchen to look at the turkey a relative came in to help her. "Cover the bird", said the first. "Uncover the bird" said the next. When the bird was served it was a disaster—raw in spots and burnt in others, but the bride smiled and said, "Don't blame me, I just followed your directions, all of your directions." The moral is that to succeed while remaining sane, a rural practitioner needs to be able to effectively plan which obligations should take top priority.

A worker is a member of the social work profession, an employee of an organization, a citizen of a rural community, and a family member. In an urban environment, a worker may have a chance to keep these identities separated for the most part. He or she is a worker during certain hours at a certain place, for instance, and then drives home where he or she becomes a family member. Once a month, at P.T.A. meetings the person becomes "community citizen" and once a year at a convention, he or she plays the roles associated with being a professional social worker. This compartmentalization is exaggerated in describing urban practice. It is misleading when applied in a rural setting. The rural worker lives and works in the same community, with the same people. There is a tendency to have the different identities of the individual merge rather than stay separated. Since the worker may be the only professional social

worker in the community, people will tend to see the worker as speaking both for the organization that employs him/her and as a spokesperson for the profession. A worker may well run into a situation in which a client is also the parent of the worker's children's playmates. Relationships are complex and rich in rural areas.

The overlap of the identities that the rural practitioner holds can be a source of strength and stability. The worker, once woven into the fabric of everyday life in the community, has a variety of different strands to pull on to get help for a client. Informal, unobtrusive measures can be used as well as the harsher, formal organizational mechanisms. By being forced to deal with individuals in a number of different contexts, the rural worker is likely to see the whole person and his or her context and to be able to empathize with the client. The risk of just seeing symptoms is reduced.

There are disadvantages, however, that have to be overcome. The first of these is the problem of words having multiple meanings. What a worker says in one situation to one audience may take on a different message when interpreted by a different group. "Now" may mean in a few days to the citizens of the community, this specific day to the organization that is employing the worker, this year to the profession, and this second to a son or daughter. The rural worker needs to be careful in making statements so that the likelihood of words boomeranging is lessened. Even with this caution, the rural practitioner is apt to spend a percentage of time just serving an as "interpreter" between groups that are speaking at cross-purposes.

The second problem area is the actual differences that occur among groups about which of a number of worthy issues should be given top priority. The rural practitioner does not have the same luxury of shifting positions with each new audience as a politician on the campaign trail does. A rural worker, therefore, needs to be able to have long term goals that can be met by a series of alternative shorter term projects. Through these shorter term projects, the worker can satisfy a number of different groups that have varied agenda while still building a base to meet the service needs of the total community.

If a rural practitioner can succeed in combining the different perspectives of the groups that have claims on him/her, that worker has an opportunity to develop a dynamic, creative, demanding but authentic lifestyle that many people seek. When it comes to rural social work, "It's the real thing".

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. How would you resolve this situation? A farm family wishes to adopt a child. They approach your agency and apply. They are willing to work with the agency at any time except the two weeks of harvest when all their time is taken up bringing in their cash crop for the year. The Central Office of your agency calls to say that a child is available but it is during harvest. Your Central Office says that if the family were really interested in the child they would make time to have a home visit now. The family says that it just is not possible.

2. How would you feel about asking a client with whom you have just had a session to drive you back into town to your office since you "hitched" a ride out to the session with your neighbor who was headed in the right direction?

3. What do you think it would be like to be labelled as "the social worker's kid" in a small rural community?

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Step 2. "Necessity is the Mother of Invention"- Strategies for Stretching Resources

There are a lot of old bromides about the importance of making do or doing without. Most rural workers will get to know these sayings well because there is rarely an overabundance of time, staff, or resource materials to use. The one thing that rural workers do seem to complain about is there being too much of urban models for delivering services. These models, particularly when they are formal, legalistic and/or bureaucratic seem to create more frustration than solutions. What seems to doom the urban models is the very thing that makes them look good on paper they are well defined and delineated. It may look good but this neat pattern tends to end up being rigid and inflexible.

What making do boils down to is being creative. Rural practice depends on the worker being willing to take the risk of being creative. Luckily, the rural environment fosters creativity. Most people in rural areas have always had to pitch in and work. There were always chores to be done, even for the youngest. The malaise of becoming a passive zombie who can never find anything to do is not an issue, especially for the rural poor. People have therefore become accustomed to giving and taking rather than one or the other. A key to stretching resources in rural areas is to allow everyone, including the worker, to be both helper and client. Of course, this strategy will only work in an environment that encourages the development of stable and complex relationships. However, even with the many changes that have occurred in the last few years, most rural communities are not likely to suffer from a lack of this interpersonal resource.

There has been a tendency for social workers to focus on areas of need without considering areas of opportunity. If necessity is the mother of invention, then problem areas should be sources for innovations. Rural areas have been quick to explore telecommunications and other advanced technologies since these may help in trying to overcome isolation. Teleconferencing is used in many rural agencies and agricultural

extension services have helped farmers to get "plugged in" to massive university computer systems.

Most people see themselves as a combination of strengths and weaknesses. By allowing the people in the community to be both helper and client, the rural worker is fulfilling two of the obligations that are a traditional part of social work: begin where the client is; be humanistic in practice. Since the people that the rural practitioner sees believe themselves to have something to contribute, using them is not a stop gap measure but a way of creating a stronger community. In the end, after all, the group needs to be able to continue without the assistance of the worker. On top of this. a worker can burn out quickly if he or she is not allowed to get help, to let off steam, and to find some release from the daily grind. Who knows the woes of dealing with delivering services better than the people in the system itself? This give and take process is one way of making problems a source of opportunity.

So far this strategy may sound very theoretical but it is not meant to be just a nice, high faluttin' proposition. Here are two different ways of applying this approach.

1. Break everything down into building blocks that can be reassembled in a number of different ways. We may know that Mr. X is the garbage man. How often do we think of the range of skills that this represents? He can drive, has access to a truck (and may know about driving a truck and/or repairing it). He has to know the area and who lives where, who is on vacation, who has been having good times and who is down on their luck. Mr. X can be a great source of information. Mr. X, in a pinch, might be a "network" for the worker if, for an example, an elderly person has not put out their garbage in a week. It is a type of early alert system.

2. Work every model backwards. This is what you might call social work bartering. By having your long term goals clearly in mind, you may be able to use some "horsetrading" with short term projects to achieve what you want.

"...How did the community interpret OEO,s Headstart Program when it got funds to run such a program? As an educational opportunity for children of the poor to get caught up with children whose parents had more financial resources? Not in a proud community which refuses to define the worth of a man by his financial resources. The Headstart Program was, very simply, an opportunity to bring into the town preschool education for all children. And that's the way that the program was conducted." (Wylie, 1973, p.21).

In the end, stretching resources is stretching ourselves. It sounds a little corny these days, but Browning sums it all up:

"...A man's reach should exceed his grasp Else what's a Heaven for?"

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. If you were a rural worker whose car broke down, how would you develop an emergency plan to cover the shut-in clients that you needed to see?

2. If you are a rural worker who is in need of a vacation, how could you use these people to "buy" yourself some time off?

    1. Local civic clubs
    2. Area community health clinic
    3. The agricultural extension service
    4. Local sheriff's department
    5. Local church council
    6. Your clients
    7. District office of the department of social services
    8. Local community college

3. Do you think that a rural practice model that stresses each person being both helper and client could work effectively in:
    a. An upper-middle-class suburb of a medium sized city
    b. A large urban ghetto
    c. A military base

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Step 3. "More than one way to skin a cat"—New Technologies and Advantages Versus Perennial Strains in The Rural Environment.

There is an old Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." People feel the shock of change in our society from increased inflation and unemployment to the more mundane fads like the rise of Pac-Man and other video invader games. It is difficult to keep from being overwhelmed by change. However, when a whole community is depending on a worker, it is imperative to find a way. Today, rural workers are making more use of advanced technology combined with increased participation in area planning and development councils. The two, in combination, are giving the rural practitioner a fighting chance of being able to approach change as an opportunity rather than just another problem.

The "use of advanced technologies" tends to bring to mind the teleconferencing ads on TV. Rural areas are indeed using these telephone advances to develop opportunities for consultation, supervision, and even training for the isolated worker. Information, the most basic of the materials that a professional uses has become a changed commodity. Client records are being computerized and stored in computerized state registries at a central office. The rural worker gains access to specific past records or adds to the record by going into the district office.

It is not just the telephone and the computer that are adding to rural practice. More experimental approaches include the use of satellites and television to bring education to remote areas. Through such new mechanisms aa well as cable television, continuing education and in-service training can reach the isolated professional.

Independent learning is not limited to large scale technologically-assisted education. Self-instruction manuals and audiocassettes are giving the worker an increased flexibility so that instruction can take place at whenever it is convenient for the learner rather than the instructor. Slide shows, videotapes and films can all be rented by mail and used as part of a training session for the community or the worker.

The catch with the use of these technological advances is money. Even when the use of the technologies would save money in the long run by moving information around rather than people, the "start up" costs can be heavy. Several methods to get around this stumbling block are being used. Workers are "borrowing" equipment and other resources from local schools, military bases and civic/church organizations. Sometimes telephone companies will, with state funds and tax breaks, set up a system for a state or a region that a rural worker can use. Cable TV stations may donate time as part of mandated community service programming.

The discussion of advanced technologies is an example of how change is permeating the rural environment. Since many of these "intrusions" from the outside are societal level problems that are met with major investments in resources, it is easy to see why the area planning councils are important. The coordinated efforts of the diverse groups that have an interest in rural development are needed to keep pace with the new trends. On a small scale this may mean a coalition of county professionals who come together to discuss the options for dealing with status offenders to regional economic councils. All are a means of giving a rural practitioner some clout. The councils are, in another way, most appropriate to rural areas where people and resources have had to be used in unconventional ways to fulfill pressing needs. The councils are just the newest version.

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. A rural enterprise zone bill has been introduced in the Congress (HR4576jS1829). The House version includes loans for rehabilitation of vocational education and rehabilitation of agricultural extension service centers. How could this benefit you if you were in rural practice?

2. How could workers in adjoining counties use telephone communications to stretch their resources in dealing with a problem that crosses the county line, a high dropout rate in local high schools?

3. How nervous are you about using a computer? A calculator? A two-way radio? A video recorder? Have you every said, "The computer screwed up?"

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Step 1. Remodeling The Old Environment and Boom Towns

Some people inch into a pool, lowering themselves bit by bit. Others dive into the water in one leap. For people who live in rural communities, it may seem that changes have come in the same way: some creep in slowly, while others are suddenly dumped into the rural area. The amount of time that a community has to assimilate and integrate new people and trend has a direct effect on the amount of disruption that the changes will cause. Put in another way, changes can expand our vistas or blow us all up. %PThe development of rural resources has often led to "boom or bust" cycles. The discovery of gold and of oil have both led to people flocking into the new area to add to their wealth. People who come in with the boom often bring colorful legends with them: the 49er's, the wildcatters, cannery row. Still, they are not there to give to the community, only to use it. With a large influx, a settlement of newcomers may develop that has little sense of belonging to the community as a whole. One of the byproducts of the boom process is that the newcomers may see one in a number of different boom towns and have a sense of neighborliness that is not linked to any locale.

New boom migrations may be sports enthusiasts who come for the skiing, retired people who come for the sun or workers coming in to work in an atomic plant. No matter what group is moving in, wouldn't it seem likely that this migration would have enough economic benefits associated with it to make up for the inconvenience of having newcomers "squatting" in the middle of the community? Unfortunately, this isn't always true. More peopoepe means that there is more stress on the services that the community must provide. Schools are needed, and roads, and sewers. More police, and teachers, and medical personnel, and caseworkers may have to be hired. The newcomers who do not have the same local network of support groups may need even more assistance than other citizens. The community is left to catch up quickly and the local population may end up feleling like Alice in Wonderland who ran as fast as she could to stay in the same place.

Ironically, at the time when the rural community starts to have the facilities to deal with the influx, the boom may pass leaving the rural community with an expensive set of mementos.

The challenge for rural workers is to assist the community in trying to plan for change and to meet the need for services when they arise. Many rural communities have begun active campaigns to attract new business to the rural areas of the county. The need to incorporate plans for gearing these invitations to the level of change that the communities can absorb without "exploding" should be an important element in the process. Assessment and community development skills are essential. Sometimes communities have sought to slow the process by limiting the number of people who can move in and establish residence. This was not been a very successful tactic for dealing with people who are already on the town's doorstep. Contingency planning is more effective. How can short and long-term services be interspersed so that not all new monies are going out as quickly as they come in? What type of industry is most appropriate to encourage migration to the area? Can local laws be used to control who is likely to take up residence?

Change and the social conflict that comes with the changes can be a creative process that pinpoints weaknesses in the community, with new and different people arriving who have new skills and values; new suggestions for solutions can emerge and new coalitions form. To allow this positive, innovative aspect to be seen, the rural worker is put in the position of trying to keep people from "blaming" any group for the problems that arise. The risk of alienation is high, but if it is avoided, if there is an attempt to allow each group to give and receive help, then the boom can be a boom rather than a bust. It surely doesn't fit the old image of placid hackwater rural practice, does it?

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. What type of industry would be of the greatest benefit to invite to your community if you lived in

   a) an agriculturally rich land in an area of the country afflicted with high unemployment in nearby cities?

   b) a small island community several miles off the coast in the Gulf of Mexico?

2. The crime rate is going up in your town. The oldtimers blame it on the rowdy workers who come to town off the oil rigs. The workers blame it on the "townies" ripping them off. How would you assist the community to meet the problem of high crime sites.

3. How would you deal with a rate of drop-outs among students in the schools in your town when there just wasn't enough facilities to meet the influx of new students?

Reading List:

Davenport, Judith and Joseph Davenport, III. Boom Towns and Human Services. Laramie, WY: University of Wyoming.

Morris, L.C. and J.H. Morris, Jr. 1981 "Preparing human service workers for practice in boom communities", Human Services in the Rural Environment 6(1): 22-28.

Robinson, J.W., Jr. 1980 "The conflict approach", pp. 73-90 in James A. Christenson and Jerry W. Robinson, Jr. (editors), Community Development in America. Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press.

Step 2. "New Wine in Old Bottles?" Answering New Questions By Using Old Sources Creatively

The process of "keeping up" for a rural practitioner involved a sophisticated application of the generalist specialist model in a variety of contexts over an extended period of time. In other words, a rural worker becomes somewhat like a jazz musician; a person who can quickly learn a melody and then improvise on it as time passes. The need to adapt and to patch together pieces of alternative techniques means, in effect, that the rural worker can be "synergistic", can do each task better for doing other different ones, i.e., the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The process of patching together solutions can be seen graphically in the way new problems are being solved with old answers. One example comes from the energy crunch. It has never been easy to get around in the rural environment. The rising coast of transportation has made it twice as difficult. Therefore, each trip out to clients must do twice as much to be cost effective. Some rural workers are seeking this efficiency through linking up with the professionals who are already going out to rural areas any way. Agricultural extension services and home economists have been deputized into being local social workers' extended delivery network. Now with budget cuts limiting these outreach programs, even older mechanisms for reaching isolated people are being called into service. Ministerial associations are being approached to have their members work with local social workers, especially in assisting with protective services. Here is a way of using and expanding the skills of the clergy that not only helps the worker to meet the client's needs, but also develops the minister and the pastoral role.

Rural schools have been used as a center of community activity for a long time. If a worker can't reach the outlying areas of a county one way, he or she may be able to use the school. Recently a worker who was basking in the success of her newest venture

reported having a very effective workshop on foster care. She contacted the teacher who was the drama coach at the local high school and arranged for the school play to be one that dealt with a family deciding to take in a foster child. When the proud parents came to see the play, they had their "consciousness raised". After the play, some of the drama club, along with the worker, held a discussion of the issue and thus reached the audience while the level of interest was still high.

The local newspaper in a rural area tends to spend more space on features than a city paper. Making time to cultivate the interest of the editor may lead to a rich harvest of good publicity for programs that are underway and spotlight the need for new ones. The paper can be a great source of information for the worker, too. Local events that draw the community together give the worker a channel to do some community education and to deliver some preventive services.

A worker with a particularly creative bent found that her work with scout troops was an opportunity to accomplish several tasks. She built up a favorable reputation in a community that did not have a high regard for social workers. She was able to encourage the youngsters to develop constructive habits and to help others. She had a means of keeping in touch with a large number of adults, the parents, in an easy and informal way. Last, but not least, she enjoyed herself.

In an age of quick, disposable goods, it may seem out of place to advocate using traditional old solutions for problems. The advantage is that the old solutions have by definition already been developed. A rural practitioner working alone has limited time as well as resources for trying out new approaches. Additionally, using old solutions may embellish new projects with the veneer of acceptability that comes with being "tried and true". It may be easier to deal with an increasing problem of adolescent delinquency if the solution involves using the sheriff's office that is already having to face the problem. The new program can be seen to be "going through the proper channels". What if there aren't any proper channels? Well, then we are back to being musicians. When all else fails, improvise.

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges

1. If you found that your county had a high incest rate, how would you work on developing a community awareness program that:

   a) did not end up making the victim feel guilty

   b) reaches the widest possible audience

   c) can survive after you are gone

   d) is built on "acceptable" lines as far as the community is concerned

Reading List:

Fitzpatrick, T.L. and D.M. Mertens. 1978 Follow-up Studies of the Appalachian Education Satellite Project Experimental Phase. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education.

Keith, T. "Radio communication in a rural social work setting", pp. 119-126, Second Annual Northern Wisconsin Symposium on Human Services in the Rural Environment, David Bast and Julia Schmidt (editors), University of Wisconsin: Extension Center for Social Service.

GETTING OUT-YOUR GETTING OUT:

Step 1. "R R" - Taking Time Away

Marathoners talk about "hitting the wall". There is a point somewhere about 3/4 of the way through the race where a runner feels that he or she is working hard but not getting anyplace. You wouldn't think that people would be tempted to quit after finishing 18-20 miles, but they are. Isolated workers often have to deal with "hitting the wall", too. After the routine has been established, after some progress has been made but before most major programs have reached a stage where they are self-sufficient, the worker may reach a point that feels like running into a wall—head first. Nowadays people call it "burn out". Whatever the label, it means that the worker needs time for "R R", rest and relaxation, in order to get the energy to go on with the job.

Ideally, a worker in any job would not completely burn out before some plans were made for taking time off. Since the rural worker is isolated, this is bound to be more difficult than just designating a week for vacation and hanging up a "gone fishing" sign. Someone needs to "cover" for the worker during "R R" periods. Services need to be delivered even if the worker isn't there. The system that many rural professionals are using involve two broadly defined categories of solutions: Changing pace while still on the job; time away from the job.

The rhythm of work used to be quite different than it is today. Play was not separate from but was an element of the productive process. Work involved, even more than today, a lifestyle rather than just a job. Barn raisings, grape stamping, singing work songs, even quilting bees are examples of light-hearted work. Since social work is not a 9-5 job in any setting, a rural worker who is under special strain, needs to take care to include enough light-hearted work in the normal routine to keep refreshed, to keep a sense of zest in doing the work. The advantage in rural practice is that since almost nothing is unrelated to the job, almost any pleasant task can be turned into light-hearted

work: Choral singing is informal network development with the local community. Football games at the local high school are as much an opportunity for getting things done as the famed Washington parties. Even interaction with the family is part of this process. Rural residents have an opportunity to see the worker at home as well as at work and will judge the healthy development of a family as a reflection of an effective practice. This is just an extension of "physician heal thyself" and "charity begins at home".

Another aspect of a change of pace at work is being able to rotate work. To an extent, rural practitioners have an advantage in that their work is not specialized and focused on just one type of task. There are jobs addressing individual needs and also ones that deal with the whole community. At the worst, the worker may feel pulled in too many directions. At best, the worker will be refreshed and will gain new insights into the business at hand by working on more than one project.

Another way of getting a new set of insights that can help a worker from becoming stale is to be able to consult with others. The worker may be the only worker in the area, but may be able to draw on the resource consultations through arranging telephone or written communications with distant supervisors. It takes initiative, but it is worth it. Professionals from other fields that are allied to social work can serve as a local mutual support group that gives the worker somewhere to "ventilate" feelings when problems mount up. A group that is often overlooked as a resource for bolstering the flagging energies of the worker are the people in the community itself. Drawing on the extended family and the ideas and approaches suggested by the clients' "significant others" gives the practitioner another tool to use. There are questions about confidentiality but, used judiciously, this resource can be a definite asset.

Having time away is a special, savored part of the work schedule that the worker needs. The catch is how to get it. Currently, workers are making good use of the professional team approach to deal with cases. When, for example, a nurse, a teacher, a

minister and a police officer share in a child abuse and neglect treatment team with the worker, it may make it possible for the worker to take time off without leaving children at risk. Some public agencies are making use of computer links and telecommunications to make sure that someone at the agency is on call even when the worker is off the scene. Still, these are both stop-gap measures. Finding ways of taking time physically away from the job is one of the toughest problems with rural practice. Well, at least you'll know that you're needed?

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. How would you as a rural worker develop a coordinated group of professionals to deal with the problem of vandalism which is becoming a major economic drain in your community?

2. What sort of advantage could exist in having to work on these different tasks:
   a. give a talk at the Rotary Club on "The Volunteer of The 1980's"
   b. do a home visit with a farm family that wishes to adopt
   c. attend executive sessions of the regional development council
   d. go to your kindergarten child's school play.

3. Do you have any sure-fire signs that you have reached the point of hitting the wall in your job?

Reading List:

Caplan, G. and M. Killilea, editors 1976 Support Systems and Mutual Help. New York, NY: Grune and Stratton.

Deaton, Robert undated "Worker Burnout in Rural Areas." Missoula, MT: University of Montana School of Social Work.

Schachter, L. F. 1981 "The Benefits of Smallness: Developing A Model for An Effective Rural Protection Team." Child Welfare 60 (3): March: 131-147.

Step 2. "Home on The Range" - Problems of Distance and Transportation

We have all heard the expression, "You can't get there from here." A rural worker learns all the meanings that can be packed into that phrase. Sometimes the problem in distance itself. At other times, it is a lack of public transportation and no funds to pay for private means. Occasionally the weather stops people in their tracks. Rural practice is colored by the effort that it takes to get from place to place, to get people to people. The difficulties not only make it more difficult for the worker and clients to interact, but also for the worker to meet with supervisors and Central Office staff.

One way of dealing with the problem is to improve the transportation systems that deliver service to rural areas. Amtrack, for example, was supposed to increase access to transportation for rural citizens. Unfortunately, spending for improving rural transportation is not expanding and many of the earlier experiments failed. Rising fuel costs have increased the strain.

Since there are almost insurmountable problems when rural people consistently have to move around, the alternative is to send information and not the people who are trying to communicate. There is a healthy industry burgeoning in teleconferencing. Rural areas are benefiting from this technology. This should not make the more humble approaches seem outdated. Audio and visual cassettes are making it possible for individualized instruction and distant consultation to be used to link the worker and the Central Office or the State University and also to link the worker and the client. Simulations and models are also being used as methods for figuring out periods of greatest strain when it is most likely that transportation will be the greatest problem. With this alternatives can be set up to assist with short-term and seasonal predictable blocks to free movement in the rural environment.

There are more people in general today who are aware of the need to preserve the environment and to use energy and resources carefully. Targeting the problem of rural

isolation with appropriate technologies, in many ways, means gaining renewed respect for the traditional as well as new plans for developing energy. If rural areas are to be able to draw people and attract industries, this challenge will continue to be a top priority.

The intensive use of social networks, a standard part of rural practice, is one of the mechanisms for passing along information and services even when the worker cannot reach a client. I a sense, there are advantages beyond just getting a client's immediate need met. The use of the network plus the client into a support system that can enrich the lives of many members of the community. It is also the sort of "technology" that is less likely to be dismantled in a period of budget cuts than systems that depend completely on a bureaucracy or a single, professional worker.

The problems of getting out and about are not easy to solve. Sometimes it is difficult just to keep from being overwhelmed. The people who work in rural areas have met with some success by coordinating the intensive use of social networks with some new and rediscovered technologies. The focus is on finding ways to help the community and the clients to move resources and information in rather than sending workers and clients out to the nearest city.

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. During the last bad storm, eighteen inches of snow fell. How would you cope if:

   a. you were running out of milk for your baby

   b. you were running low on heating oil

   c. you ran out of medicine for your asthma

2. If you had a taperecorder that you could take with you in the car, would you record your notes? Play an instructional tape?

Reading List:

Proceedings of the First National Network Building Conference 1980 "Coordinating Human Services at The Local Level." Falls Church, VA: Institute for Information Studies.

Tapley, J. 1982 "Teleconferencing: Where Do You Begin." Audio Visual Directions. 4 (1): January: 73-75.

Step 3. Exit - Ways of Leaving Your Job That are Good for You and Good for The Next Guy

"For This is Wisdom: To Have and Hold, and in Time, Let Go."

The essence of good rural practice is to have long-term goals that you can meet through a number of different short-term projects. If a worker is considering whether to leave the rural environment, the decision should be related to the long-term goal. Of course, people leave for other commonly known reasons: an agency closes; a spouse is transferred. However, keeping these non-job-related reasons, there are some important decisions that could lead to leaving a position. First, a person may find that the long-term goal has been achieved. Second, it may be impossible to ever reach the long-term goal. Third, the worker's long-term goal may change.

Lawyers have an old maxim that says that many a case has been lost after it has been won because the lawyer said too much. Well, if lawyers need to know when to stop, so do social workers. When a person is the only worker for an area, it is easy to slip into the trap of skimping on time for evaluation, especially self-assessment. A person may get into a rut because of success: Once the basic agenda has been accomplished, it can be easy but stultifying to muddle along with the job. Evaluation and change may revitalize the practitioner, the clients and the job itself. After all, the rural operation may require different characteristics in personnel during new phases of the work and a worker may not have equal ability or interest in all the requisite skills. It may be that the worker need not even leave the community, but can find another setting in which the wide range of generalist/specialist skills of the rural worker can be used. In any case, evaluation is the key.

We all bring a set of hopes and expectations to a new job. Sociologists call it "anticipatory socialization". Part of this process of preparing ourselves for the job

before we begin it is to think through what should be and what will be the basic goals that will be set. Usually there has to be some modification of the goals as we get a taste of reality on the job. All of this is fairly straightforward. The catch is when the goals that the worker has don't fit the reality of the job at all. It takes a lot of effort to get into the rural environment physically and socially. Given that investment, it is just as well to think through "escape routes" early on so that a person doesn't end up stuck with the job and the clients/community get stuck with a dissatisfied or uninterested practitioner. Escape routes are hard to come by in an economic recession. Still, even thinking through what will constitute the outside limits of what is acceptable may improve the present job. It may trigger ideas about how to renegotiate and what to ask for. It may also help everyone who has an interest in seeing that the clients' needs are met to clarify just what the goals for the position realistically can be.

A variation on this first type of planning escape routes occurs when the worker finds that his or her personal goals change. We all hope that we will grow and mature as time passes. Ironically, we may not allow for our priorities changing with the new maturity. The need to have a "fit" between the worker's agenda and the job's requirements may mean that only the most dynamic type of work can be appropriate to a person at a variety of stages of life. Of course, the diversity of rural practice does give it the potential to be this rich and diverse but it is not a guarantee.

Another aspect of making a good exit is to find a way of leaving the job in good shape for the next guy. In a rural environment where the job involves developing particularly strong personal and social ties with the community, it can almost cripple the new worker if the previous one leaves having created a lot of ill will. There is also an extra responsibility placed on the rural worker to the replacement because, especially with a one man/woman operation, the community tends to perceive the worker's characteristics as the model for social work practice. Given that there are these extra responsibilities, what can a rural worker do when there are problems and unresolved

tensions? One of the obvious solutions does work. Making a closing evaluation in which the worker specifies both personal goals and expectations and where these did not jibe with the job requirements is a professional and responsible approach. It gives the next guy invaluable information. It can also be useful to the agency and community in trying to choose a new worker. Still, this is an ideal. It might be professional suicide if the circumstances were wrong. At minimum, the worker owe it to the replacement to try to make clear to all (client, supervisor, community) when problems arise that there are unresolved issues.

Rural practitioners cannot depend on a vast bureaucracy to keep them plugging away like a little cog in the machinery of an agency just like a million other pieces. Rural workers are out front, visible. It means that everyone knows when they enter and when they exit . The rural practitioners owe it to themselves and their clients to "finish up in style."

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. Have you every participated in a course evaluation? If so, what was good and useful about it, and what was a waste of time?

2. Have you ever made an assessment of your personal goals? Have you ever formally assessed what your long-term goals are for your work? Do you think that the two should be considered together or separately?

3. On what sort of information do you base your preliminary ideas for long-term goals during the anticipatory period? Do you usually size a situation up realistically? Is there usually a pattern to the way that you misjudge the new situation?

Reading List:

Bennis, Warren, et al (editors). 1973 Interpersonal Dynamics Essays and Readings on Human Interaction, 3rd edition. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Wheeler, Ladd 1970 "Chapter 16: Influence and Life." In Interpersonal Influence." Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., pp. 107-114.

OTHERS GETTING OUT:

Step 1. The Out-Migration - Who is Still Leaving

While rural America is drawing increasing numbers of retired people, manufacturers, and other new groups of people, there are still people who are leaving the rural areas. It is important for a worker in rural areas to understand that there are elements in the rural environment that are pushing people out as well as drawing them in.

Several problems are making it difficult for people to stay in rural areas. Some have to do with the changing structure of the basic economics of the industries in rural areas. A second set of factors have to do with the unequal distribution of services and monies to rural areas. A third set of "push factors" are the changing structure of cities that are reaching out and, in a sense, capturing rural areas.

The plight of the American farmer has been in the news a lot in the past few years. Grain embargoes, bankrupt grain elevators, unprofitable prices for livestock and pressure from inflation have made it more and more difficult for the small operator to stay in business. A great deal of anger has been directed against the Southeast Asian migrants who have tried to establish themselves in the fishing ports of the South. This may be as much a reflection of the economic stress that Americans in the fishing industry as a reaction against the immigrants. The family has been a source of great strength to people living in rural areas. However, changes in the economy are eroding some of the cornerstones of familial power. Inheritance taxes and inflation are making it difficult to pass on the family's accumulated wealth. The diversified options that are opening for women outside the home is making it easier for females to move away from the traditional familial role of mother and helpmate. To summarize, this set of push factors are societal forces that make it difficult for the rural resident to maintain a traditional lifestyle.

The social worker who has clients suffering with the stress of these push factors does not have an easy task. Especially if the worker is a newcomer, he/she may seem to represent the very forces of change that is being directed at the rural area from the outside world that the potential clients are trying to resist Finding ways of easing the stress without weakening the traditional support systems, i.e., the extended family, the church and the community opinion leaders, demands that the worker have a real empathy for the traditional rural institutions.

The rural areas of the United States have suffered for decades from a disproportionate lack of professional services and money for developing better housing, schools, and cultural events. Rural workers are becoming adept at using rural coalitions, regional development councils, and other community development groups to gain the "clout" necessary to fight for a fair share of the dwindling public service dollars. Beyond this, however, the upgrading of the rural resources may depend more on the ability of rural communities to "sell" the rural quality of life to young, educated professionals than on some political vote. At the moment, though, there is a movement into non-metropolitan areas, the movement of the professionals is still fairly limited and the rural based professional and cultural groups have yet to numerically offset the traditional movement of the young, educated rural people to metropolitan areas. Though it is changing, there is still an element of, "How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paree?"

The last set of push factors are a clear example of the saying that sometimes "you can't win for losing." The very success of rural areas in attracting new growth may end up killing them off. If the rural "pull" factors draw the cities out to the rural setting, then the rural communities may be absorbed into an urban SMSA (Standard metropolitan statistical area). The greatest growth in rural areas has been in those rural communities that abut metropolitan areas and these are the very settings that are most vulnerable to being gobbled up by urban sprawl. Part of being a rural practitioner is coming to grips

with the fact that in ten years you may be in the same community but you may be defined as an urban social worker

It is less and less frequent that rural America is seen as what is left over after the cities and suburban fringe have been defined. Rural areas are being seen as having a distinct identity, even if it is hard to define. The modern rural community may be able to attract people from the outside into the rural area, but the rural community still, for all these draws, is also in a difficult competition with cities. Sometimes the cities win.

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. Mr. X has maintained control in his family since he is the patriarch of a profitable but relatively small family farm. His daughter-in-law who resents his control, seeks work off the farm in a suburban shopping center. Tension in the family is increased since the daughter-in-law was the unpaid bookkeeper for the farm and now a substitute must be hired, a major drain financially. In retaliation, the family refuses to help out the son and daughter-in-law with child care for their two preschoolers. The children are not receiving adequate supervision. What sort of intervention would you use given:

   a. that you are a young, B.S.W., female from a suburban area
   b. that you a young female in a family that farms and in which you help out by keeping the books

2. American vineyards are not only doing well, but, especially those in California, are being eyed by European vintners who want to expand by buying up these wineries. Would this trend "pull" or "push" people toward or away from rural areas? Will it act as both a pull and a push factor?

Reading List:

Ford, Thomas R., editor. 1977 Rural Society in The United States - Current Trends and Issues. Ames, IA: University of Iowa Press.

Forestall, R. L. 1981 "Is America becoming more metropolitan?" American Demographics 3 (11): December: 18-22.

Maamary, Samir N. 1976 Attitude Towards Migration among Rural Residents: Stages and Factors Involved in The Decision to Migrate. San Francisco, CA: R and E Research Associates.

Tucker, C. J. 1981 "Age and educational dimensions of recent U. S. migration reversals." Growth and Change. 12 (2): April: 31-36.

Step 2. "Market Day" - Products Exported from Rural Areas

Generally people think of raw materials being produced in rural settings, exported for processing to metropolitan areas, and finished goods flowing back to the rural environment. That idea is dated. It does not take the rise of non-metropolitan manufacturing and service industries into account. In the social services, there is a new pressure to decentralize and to deliver services at the local level. The social service strategies that have a successful track record in local, rural communities, therefore, are being reviewed and tried in urban neighborhoods. Though the list is not exhaustive, three approaches that have been used extensively in rural settings may be used more and more in urban service delivery: multidisciplinary professional support groups, courtship and restitution.

Starting with the strategy that is mostly focused on the worker, we can see that the rural practitioners who want to have the personal and career oriented support of a peer group may have to turn to people who are not in their profession. Rural professionals are forced to go beyond their own local organization to develop a range of services for clients. The process of case coordination teams have been used, as it is in metropolitan areas, too. In rural settings, however, there is more than a case limited approach. Rural workers must develop a more continuous communication system that allows them to understand the job definitions and professional expectations of their counterparts in other service oriented groups. The creative aspects of seeing service delivery as a multi-faceted attempt to meet clients' needs keep rural professionals alert to new trends. It may also lessen some of the stress that makes the worker feel stale and burned out by allowing diverse profeaaionals to share their resources, and feelings, as well as develop issue oriented advocate networks. Put in other words, "Many hands make light work."

Professional support groups are one example of how the rural worker needs to be able to stay in close touch with his/her environment. Another form of this "Opportunity Surveillance" is the courtship process that the rural professional goes through with the community, especially when entering a new community. In the last decades more ethnic and cultural groups have been seeking recognition and appreciation of their unique contributions to their communities: Blacks, native Americans, women, the elderly, et al. Workers in response have sought out ways of becoming more sensitive to the special needs and skills of the various groups. Rural workers, particularly due to their visibility in the community and isolation from other workers, tend to be very sensitive to cues from their environment. There is a "wholistic" style to rural practice so that the worker has an impetus to stay aware of how he/she is acting in relation to the local power structure, opinion leaders, and traditions. Delivering services means using the full range of formal but also informal networks that tie worker, client and community together. Medical personnel call it "bedside manner." Rural workers also become expert at courting the community and listening to the people who live in the community. That ability, though hardly new, is worth exporting beyond the rural sections of the country.

Visibility is not just an issue for the worker; it affects everyone in the rural environment. If you live in a rural setting, people expect to know you and to know something about you. This expectation that residents should be integrated into the community can lead to rigidity and distrust but it can also be a source of strength that helps when social problems threaten. Crime rates, particularly among juveniles, have been rising at alarming rates, including in rural areas. The visibility that is such an integral part of rural life allows strategies that reintegrate the adjudicated offender into the community rather than isolating the delinquent to be used successfully. An example of this is restitution, where the juvenile delinquent is sentenced to make reparation payment to the victim and/or the community. The juvenile is being forced to face the consequence of his/her actions fully. The programs are not easy to administer. The

victim may not want to be tied in any way to the offender. Still, these programs hold out the hope of lower rates of recidivism since the offender is not cut off from the mainstream of his or her society. While these programs are particularly appropriate to rural communities, the technique is being tried in urban areas, too. The need to find the proper method of supervising and monitoring this sort of community based treatment may mean that rural communities that already have a strong set of social networks will take the lead in the further development of restitution projects.

Rural social work practice has been the focus of this O-J-D packet. By reviewing ways of getting in, keeping up, and getting out of rural practice, we hope that we have not only been able to highlight the characteristics of rural practice but also to show that rural social work has something of worth to contribute to the country as a whole.

Rural Social Workers, We Salute You!

Some Exercises and Mental Challenges:

1. Who do you think would qualify to fall into the category of professional peer? How much do you know about the official job description for people filling that position?

2. How would you handle this situation? Two young junior high school boys were caught after they defaced the church that is the center of worship of the local ethnic minority, Catholic French Canadians. You wish to have the boys participate in a restitution project in which they would have to help out with service to the church. However, the French Canadians distrust the youngsters and feel that it might be inappropriate or sacrilegious to have them work on the building itself. The boys and their families show distain for the French Canadians but do wish to find an alternative to harsher forms of punishment.

Reading List:

Doane, J. A. and E. L. Cowen 1981 "Interpersonal help-giving of family practice lawyers." American Journal of Community Psychology. 9 (5): 547-557.

Jankovic, Joanne, Ronald K. Green, and Shandler D. Cronk, editors. 1980 Juvenile Justice in Rural America. Knoxville, TN: Office of Continuing Education, University of Tennessee, School of Social Work.

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CASE MANAGEMENT: TRIGGER QUESTIONS

FOR LINE STAFF IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

This section of the packet provides you with a way of rethinking and organizing the material in previous sections. It does this by asking you to address some questions in relation to the job you currently perform. The questions are based on an image of practice reflected in a case management model. But the best answers to the questions are obtained by combining your experiences on the job with concepts provided in this packet.

As you will see, case management cannot be discussed apart from the context of a real-world social service. I have chosen to imagine that you work in the field of child welfare because I know most about that field.

The information provided under each question is intended to further your vigorous thinking about the topic. It is not intended as an answer to the question. Indeed, for many of the questions, final answers are not available at this stage in our thinking about case management.

The order of the questions is somewhat arbitrary.

Question 1 — Agency Assessment: Context. What contextual factors influence assessment?

Case management is a model linked to specific institutional context. Stated differently it is a method of practice that uses the goals and rules of government, law, and agency. For example, child welfare is practiced within a legal framework, so assessment is sensitive to rules of evidence. Government and agency policy stress permanency planning, so assessment is partly a search for options to insure permanency.

What are the goals of your agency? How do they influence assessment? What contextual factors should you be responsive to in assessment?

Question 2 — Agency Assessment: Resources. What actual and possible resources does your agency command?

Because the assessment of a case deals as much with resources as with problems, you need a checklist of community resources. How could other systems be used to contribute to the goals of your agency? This packet provides many examples of groups and systems that could be used by you. Indeed, as a representative of an agency you often have the authority to request and determine how some resource systems contribute resources to a case.

A case management model reflects two assumptions here. First, that the help you provide will require an in-depth understanding of how to use community resource systems. You may wish to scan this packet as an aide in identifying resource systems and to obtain suggestions about how to use them. Second, the model assumes that your authority must be consciously used in your practice approach.

The image of accountability underlying case management is one of linking a client to the system that will actually promote goal attainment. The assumption is that the wrong service is more harmful than no service. If we reflect on the injunction to do the least harm, we must acknowledge that any service constitutes an intrusion into family life. We must carefully examine whether such intrusiveness is balanced by a payoff for the family in goal attainment. This requires a precise understanding of what services are actually provided by other systems. For example, it is not enough to know that an agency provides counseling. What problem-solving methods are actually used? Counseling covers a range of methods. Some may not promote goal attainment for a particular client.

Question 3 — Agency Assessment: Rule Making. What rules risk a negative impact on families?

A case management model is based on an image of rule making as a property of emergent social systems. Moreover, the model assumes that the study of the consequences of rules for the case is of vital importance.

For example, consider a newly formed shelter care center making rules about visiting hours for parents. That sounds reasonable enough from the perspective of center staff. But from the perspective of parents, we must ask, "What message does such a rule send to parents?"

Question 4 — Agency Assessment: Accountability. How are other resource systems held accountable for providing a particular service?

Case management requires accountability between your agency and collateral services. Accountability must be worked out at the management level. If you are a line worker in child welfare and a mental health worker was not providing the service requested, you are not in a position to compel a change. Management must work out an agreement between the two agencies. Has this been done? What is the nature of the agreement? Does the agreement stipulate which workers makes a decision and which worker implements a decision made by the other? Has management ever refused payment to a contracting agency?

Accountability with the informal support systems discussed in this packet perhaps can be more general: you are asking for general support not a particular service.

Question 5 — Agency Assessment: Risk Taking. What supports can you discover within the agency or surrounding environment for risk taking?

First, I should ask, what risks do you want to take? Virtually every innovation discussed in this manual and in the case management model requires risk taking. Consider the concept of peer consultation. Are you willing to take the risk of sharing openly with peers? Will you take the risk of disagreeing with them? Or, consider the use of social networks. What risks are involved in forming and maintaining them?

Risk taking is a system not an individual problem. To take risks, and avoid burnout, requires supports inside and outside the agency not character development. This packet can be scanned for helpful ideas pertaining to supports for risk taking.

Question 6 — Agency Assessment: Target System. What does your agency claim to change? How is failure explained?

A case management model reflects the assumption that interactions can be changed rather than individuals. For example, a case manager would claim to have the ability to change parent-child interaction (e.g., the parent will use different techniques of discipline) rather than the parent's characteristics (e.g., low self-esteem).

Let's take an example of failure: a mother diagnosed as mentally ill has not visited her child in foster care for over a year, the child exists in a state of limbo. The usual agency explanation points to the mother's illness as an explanation of failure; when the mother changes ("gets well"), the child will be returned.

A case manager would explain this failure very differently. The explanation would draw on an ecological systems view: the mother interacts with the mental health, foster care, legal, and developmentally disabled systems. How do these systems contribute to failure? In short, failure is explained by interactional rather than individual factors.

Question 7 — Agency Assessment: Case Management Role. What factors support or inhibit a case management model in your agency?

The question can be refined in terms of three facets of case management: First, the discretion of the worker is limited by agency goals and rules, law, and standards for decision making. In short, the worker is less of a free agent. Second, case management involves the marshaling and coordination of resources rather than direct helping. Third, case management involves a time limited decision-making approach in which decision making is based on careful and complete assessment. Studies have suggested that, without a case management approach, decision making is too reflective of drift, crises, court imposition, or the worker's values.

Obviously, you can't just decide by yourself to be a case manager, the changes are too drastic. Management and supervisors must support the role. Do they? Could they be persuaded to? Or, could they support some parts of the role? This packet describes several innovative concepts that fit a case management model. Which ones could administration support (peer consultation? teamwork? use of informal systems, etc.)?

Question 1 — Case Assessment: First Question. What is the first question you ask when assigned a new case?

If our image of helping focuses on the individual and the worker-client relation, we are likely to start by asking questions about the client's characteristics, pathologies, and motives. If our image of helping focuses on family-environment interaction our questions will deal with these environmental factors.

The procedural assumption made here about assessment is that if your beginning questions are narrow it is difficult to move to broader questions focusing on situational forces.

This packet provides many concepts that can be used if you begin with a broad based assessment that gives serious attention to environmental factors, such as, support networks, power and other concepts in the section on community assessment.

Question 2 — Case Assessment: Causation What external, interactive factors influence the family? What are the consequences of parent-child interaction?

These questions imply a different image of cause-effect relationships. Causes of family dysfunction are understood as the impact of systems external to and interacting with the family. Thus a case manager would not look at the personalities or characteristics of family members to understand dysfunction but at the impact or "feedback" of interactions outside the family.

Similarly, the case manager asks a different question when assessing a smaller segment of the family. First, interaction between family members is assessed not separate individuals. Second, the question in assessment is not: Why does (for example) a parent behave that way? This question prompts a search for motives or characteristics. Rather the question is: What is the payoff of interaction for this parent? Or, do these interactions add up to a rewarding experience for the parent?

We can conclude from the above that other approaches reflect the assumption that factors coming before the problem and within the person constitute causes. In the case management model a different assumption guides assessment: factors coming after the problem and outside the person constitute causes. In short, consequences of interaction are treated as causes.

This packet delineates groups, trends, types of interactions, and many systems. Most have some impact on the family. Most of them are, therefore, candidates that may be considered in the assessment process. Which interactions contribute to family stress? Which interactions impact the family positively?

Questions 3 — Case Assessment: Causation. What factors promote and inhibit goal attainment?

The image of assessment in a case management model is bounded by a framework of social policy, law, agency rules and goals. Within this framework assessment is further constrained by client goals. For example, a first question for a parent with a child in foster care would be, "What do you want for your child?" This question is discussed—in a nonjudgmental way—until the parent's goal for the child is identified. Assessment continues with a focus on barriers and personal and environmental resources in relation to the goal. This packet can be scanned for topics of discussion. For example, assuming the mother wants her child returned home, what barriers, assets, resources does the packet suggest that could influence goal attainment?

Question 4 — Case Assessment: Scientific Decision Making. What is the basis for intervention, values or science?

Many cases come to our attention because people display behaviors that violate social values; the basis for intervention is the regulation of social morality. Nonetheless, a case management model reflects a scientific approach to decision making.

The difference between the two approaches is major. Intervention following a scientific approach requires answers to some difficult questions: What is the specific harm to the child (of a given parent behavior)? Can the relationship between parent behavior and harm to child be documented? Can we predict the harm to the child if no intervention occurs? So its not enough—if you are going to base your decisions on science rather than values—to note that a parent is alcoholic or whatever. You must show the specific harm resul .g to the child from parent behavior.

Question 5 — Case Assessment: Empathy. What does the client's interactional structure look and feel like?

I use the phrase interactional structure to suggest the unique emphasis the concept empathy takes on when discussed as part of a case management model. Empathy used here is not about feelings alone, but about what it feels like to be a part of a particular interactional system.

It is perhaps easier to visualize the client' 's situational reality when both of you live in a small community. This is one of the advantages of working in a smaller community. This packet provides us with many concepts that may be used to organize the reality we see when we adopt the client's frame of reference.

We should fully develop this ability to visualize the client's interactional structure. This capacity will offer insights into many of the decisions the case manager makes.

Question 6 — Case Assessment: Information. Do you have a criteria for data collection?

Decision making is the crux of a case management model. Information is deliberately sought which will aid decision making. Information obtained without knowing how it can be used in decision making may be an unnecessary intrusion into the client's personal affairs.

How do we know which information is relevant to decision making? First you have to be clear about the decision you are trying to make. For example, suppose you have to decide whether or not to remove a child from his/her parents. What criteria should guide data collection? Here you draw from your experience and the literature to design criterion items that are assumed to contribute to the child's risk of being harmed if he/she remains in the home. One such item could be the current use of harsh punishment, another could be provocative behavior on the part of the child, and so on. Information is collected according to this criteria and used to decide if the child should stay in the home.

Question 7 — Case Coordination. How do you build a network of formal and informal services to a family? How do you change the interaction between family and a system in the network?

A case management model emphasizes the role of case coordinator. This requires detailed knowledge of community resources and skill in linking resources to families.

In rural areas a most frequent request of the social worker is to provide information on community resources. Often questions require precise information such as the eligibility requirements for a service.

Coordination is here used to mean "to harmonize in a common action or effort" (American Heritage Dictionary). Given the different goals and rules of agencies and informal system this is a major task. It requires the careful use of authority and an assessment of the net result of different linkages.

Question 9 — Case Monitoring. How do you obtain information on case progress?

Case monitoring is an essential role of the case manager. Again, it requires the tactful use of authority. For example, you may have to request a progress report from another agency to be rewritten in greater detail.

Within a scientific decision-making approach case monitoring provides feedback on the validity of your predictions. For example, you may have linked the client to an activity program of some sort, predicting that this would reduce social isolation. However, case monitoring may reveal that the prediction was in error for this particular client.

We do not have certain knowledge—from literature or experience—about the factors that cause social isolation (or any other client concern). Case monitoring is a way of insuring accountability as we make decisions in the face of uncertainty.